PRESSING MATTERS - THE RISE OF E-PRESSES

by Belinda Weaver

'Publish or perish' has long been a fact of life for university academics. Getting into print – as often as possible – is seen as the key to opportunities for tenure and promotion. The better the journal, the better the opportunities, since the best journals have the elusive 'impact factor'; which means an article accepted for one of the top journals counts for more than two in less highly respected publications.

Yet, 'impact factor' is a vexed issue. Certainly, most academics would like to be published in what they regard as the top journals in their field; which academic, given the opportunity, would not? Yet the top journals are possibly among the most expensive, and, with costs ever rising, many libraries are saying 'Enough!' and cancelling subscriptions. (For example, the average subscription price of a journal in the science, technology and medicine field increased by 471% between 1970 and 1995, and journal publishing profit margins frequently surpass 25% annually, a figure only matched in the expensive luxury goods market.) Thus the readership of scholarly journals – limited as it must be to subscribers and to those fortunate enough to get copies by inter-library loan or through academic contacts - is limited. Research impact, that most desirable outcome of research publishing, is blunted. After all, it is not enough just to get research 'out there'; to be effective, research needs to be read, used, cited and built upon. Otherwise knowledge cannot advance, and wealth creation, based on scientific and other advances, can slow down. The academic published in leading journals may be happy enough with his or her career trajectory, but most would like their ideas to reach a wider audience and to have more of an impact than they do.

With the immense opportunities for the dissemination of material opened up by electronic publishing, there should be no reason for anyone with online access to be locked out of the vast research output of the world's universities. Yet, coming hard on the heels of the long-running 'serials pricing crisis' or 'crisis in scholarly publishing' – a worldwide crisis caused the double whammy of ever-shrinking library budgets and escalating journal prices. This was made worse for Australian libraries by long-lasting poor exchange rates against the two significant currencies in journal purchasing, the US dollar and the euro – and was followed by what Peter Suber, of the Free Online Scholarship Movement, calls the 'permission crisis'. He states:

> One might expect relief from digital technologies that allow the distribution of perfect copies at virtually no cost. But so far these technologies have merely caused panic among traditional publishers, who have reacted by laying a second crisis for libraries and researchers on top of the first. The new crisis is still in its first decade and doesn't yet have a name. Let me call it the permission crisis. It's the result of raising legal and technological barriers to limit how libraries may use the journals for which they have so dearly paid. The legal barriers arise from copyright law and licensing agreements (statutes and contracts). The technological barriers arise from digital rights management (DRM): software to block access by unauthorized users, sometimes with the help of special hardware. The permission crisis is a complex quadruple-whammy arising from statutes, contracts, hardware, and software.

Increasing amounts of research go online daily, yet only a select (and privileged) audience can use it. Suber is right when he states that even those whose institutions subscribe can have difficulties getting access to online material – a raft of access barriers exist that must be scaled before entry is granted. These do not only consist of authentication systems, such as username and password sets, or domain or IP recognition. Licensing agreements may preclude off-campus use. Latest issue embargoes also exist, while back issues may be available electronically or not, depending on subscription choices. In a world where online provision should make it a cinch to get information, the bar for the permissions necessary to get that information is set ever higher. As Suber correctly says: 'libraries are hamstrung by licensing terms and software locks that prevent them from using electronic journals in the same full and free way that they may now use print journals'. The Royal Society notes that new digital storage and delivery technologies have come hand in hand with technical measures to prevent access, thus threatening the 'fair dealing usage' that researchers have come to depend upon for reproducing modest amounts of their own work in teaching or in further research.

It was these kinds of 'crises' that the e-Press, along with other initiatives such as open access repositories, preprint archives and so on, was created to solve. Journals too expensive? Start your own. For many academics, this was *the* option. Rather than see their research reach an increasingly rarefied audience, they started new journals from scratch, taking advantage of both the opportunities and economies offered by electronic publishing – opportunities that meant dissemination of research to a world audience of scholars on a scale impossible in paper, and economies associated with the move away from expensive print runs and postage towards the 'free' online product, produced in a range of formats, such as HTML and PDF.

E-publishing offered academics the chance of changing the scholarly publishing paradigm. In one optimistic scenario, no more would academics need to subscribe to expensive journals, either individually or through their libraries. Rather, academics would themselves pay (out of research budgets) the costs of publication, which include the refereeing / peer review process, and journals would be free. This, along with self-archiving, is one of the two strategies of the George Soros-sponsored Open Society Institute. They advocate free, open access journals, with any costs to be raised by means other than subscriptions. Things have not quite

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worked out that way in the main, though journals and e-Presses set up under the banner of changing scholarly publishing generally do set lower prices than the giant publishers such as Reed Elsevier (which owns more than 1,500 titles), Carfax or Kluwer.

Stanford University Libraries' HighWire Press (**http://www.highwire.org/**) is one e-Press that has made good use of online opportunities. HighWire Press launched in early 1995 with one journal, the online version of the weekly *Journal of Biological Chemistry*; it now supports a very large range of online journal sites (363 at the time of writing), primarily in the fields of science, technology, and medicine, and publishes much of this material on behalf of scholarly societies. As a research institution, Stanford was strongly affected by the serials pricing crisis; its solution was to plan for the (affordable) ongoing provision of scholarly information to researchers by launching an e-Press that could be a vehicle not just for research, but also for the use of new technologies for scientific communication. Rather than just mount electronic images of printed pages, HighWire journals link authors, articles and citations, provide advanced searching, offer high-resolution images and multimedia, and allow some degree of interactivity. HighWire currently generates enough profits to keep itself viable. Anyone wishing to make use of their journal publishing service, called Bench>Press, can enter into negotiations with the Press.

Johns Hopkins University Press (JHUP) is another e-Press success story. Though still committed to the print-based scholarly monograph business, JHUP (**http://www.press.jhu.edu/**) has branched out into an e-Press, under the name Project Muse (**http://muse.jhu.edu/**). The Journals section, which includes both print and electronic, has a separate Web site (**http://www.press.jhu.edu/press/journals/**) and Johns Hopkins is interested in hearing from academics with prospective journal start-ups. Journal publishing was originally seen as a revenue-raiser for the Press, which has never been subsidised by the university. As Jack Goellner of JHUP stated: 'With journal publishing, you get the money first, then you send the journal.' (Certainly this seems a better model than book publishing with its upfront costs of editing, production, printing and binding – all with no guarantee of a satisfactory return.) JHUP now owns 22 journals and publishes another 31 on behalf of other organizations, such as scholarly societies and universities. In 1994, some of this publishing went online with the launch of Project Muse, which began with just five online journals and now provides almost a thousand institutions with access to more than 225 journals, either in HTML or as a downloadable PDF, many with back archives. Project Muse is mirrored in Australia at the University of Queensland Library (**http://muse.uq.edu.au/**). The JHUP e-Press not only covers costs, it delivers royalty payments to its member publications, thus enabling many smaller publications that might have gone under to stay viable.

The latest entrant into the e-Press field has been bepress, shorthand for the Berkeley Electronic Press (**http://www.bepress.com**). Bepress trumpets itself as the solution to academic publishing online, promising to end the lengthy delays (sometimes longer than a year) associated with peer review and readying material for print publication. It guarantees a quick turnaround (10 weeks) for submitted articles. It can do this by simultaneously submitting articles for consideration to more than one journal at a time, a complete reversal of the current inefficient, only-one-at-a-time system. Libraries or other interested bodies, such as scholarly societies, can use bepress to set themselves up as publishers in direct competition to the giant conglomerates. Bepress is an electronic-only publishing system; with no print production and dissemination costs, journals can be started and maintained relatively cheaply. Users have a number of options with bepress. They can arrange for bepress to organise the publishing for them, or can license the technology to set up their own journals or other kinds of publications. Bepress's EdiKit program allows editors to manage articles, via a Web-based interface, through all stages from submission to publication.

Until now, the e-Press idea has been slow to get off the ground in Australia. E-Print archives have been quicker to get going; the Group of Eight universities began work on establishing those through member libraries as long ago as 2001, when ANU launched its pre- and post-print repository. However, e-Presses are suddenly being talked of, and planned for, in a number of places. Monash was the first Australian university to announce concrete plans for an e-Press in April, 2003. The e-Press, to be managed by the Library for the first two years of its life, aims to publish the university's research by creating new, peer-reviewed scholarly journals.

The aim of the project is to wrest some degree of control of scholarly publishing away from the large commercial publishers who currently dominate the scholarly communication market - not always to the benefit of scholars, and causing what the UK Royal Society calls a 'tension between private profit and public good' - and return it to the academics and researchers who produce it. The university aims to publish the first materials for the project by the end of 2003.

Additional benefits, as with e-Print archives, will be greater international visibility for the work of both the university and of individual researchers. Another aim, shared with other e-Presses such as HighWire and bepress, is to overcome the lengthy delays associated with traditional print publishing. The immediacy of electronic publishing will get research into circulation faster, as well as providing a gateway to the information for scholars worldwide who need easy access to that kind of material. Monash has no plans to scrap peer review. All submissions will need to be reviewed and those published will have been through a process of approval by an editorial committee, not necessarily all drawn from within Monash itself. Should the e-Press prove to be a genuinely cost-effective way to publish, Monash will be on to a winner, and may then consider

taking on journal publishing for organisations, associations and scholarly societies outside Monash itself.

ANU may be the next cab off the rank as they have recently approved plans for an e-Press as well. Other possible entrants in the market include the University of Canberra, Sydney University, and others within the Group of Eight member institutions.

Certainly, any institution starting from scratch as a publisher is in the happy position of setting its own rules about digital rights. Having such complete control may go some way towards avoiding the vexed question of intellectual property ownership, which has proved something of a hurdle for those involved in creating e-Print archives. The downside of publishing in prestigious journals is that academics so frequently sign over considerable rights, in print as well as digitally, over their own works, making it difficult to reuse their own research in teaching, and frequently making deposit in open access archives – desirable for maximising research access – well-nigh impossible.

E-presses have much to offer the scholarly communication process. They have already gone some way to re-engineering journal publishing. The logical next step for e-Presses may be in book production and dissemination. Could the arrival of e-Presses herald an electronic-led revival of ailing university presses, beset by shrinking markets, rising print costs and falling sales?

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NET NOTE

GOOGLE NEWS

Google News (**http://www.news.google.com.au**) presents information culled from approximately 4,500 news sources worldwide; items are automatically arranged to present the most relevant news first. Topics are updated continuously throughout the day. Google has developed an automated grouping process for Google News that pulls together related headlines and photos from thousands of sources; this allows the user to see how different news organisations are reporting the same story. Google News is unusual in that it offers a news service compiled solely by computer algorithms, without human intervention. While the sources of the news vary in perspective and editorial approach, their selection for inclusion is done without regard to political viewpoint or ideology. The history of a developing issue can be tracked by clicking the "sort by date" function on the page containing all reports on a given topic. The results are arranged in chronological order, with the most recent report placed first.

Google News includes articles that have appeared within the past 30 days. The service comes in several country editions to cater for different audiences. These are, currently, Australia, Canada, Germany, India, New Zealand, UK and the US. Top news stories are classified under the following headings: world, Australia, business, sci/tech, sport, entertainment and health interest.

NET NOTE

TFPL FREE INFORMATION SKILLS TOOLKIT LAUNCHED

TFPL (**http://www.tfpl.com**), the UK-based provider of recruitment and training services in the area of knowledge, library, information, records and Web content management, has launched its *Knowledge and Information Skills Toolkit*. The Toolkit is a Web-enabled diagnostic tool designed to help individuals and organisations to identify and assess the skills required to operate successfully in the knowledge economy. The product is the result of three international research projects undertaken by TFPL, enhanced by the further results gained from client projects and product testing. A feature of the Toolkit is the *spidergram*, which is used to represent the skills assessments.

The Toolkit is available free to individuals on the TFPL Web site; it is also being delivered as a commercial package to organisations as a tailored intranet-based management tool. Differing versions of the Toolkit are available to organisations wishing to focus on information literacy or document and records management.